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WORLD SOCIAL SCIENCE REPORT 2016 – CHALLENGING INEQUALITIES: PATHWAYS TO A JUST WORLD

Amanda R. Franco¹

- o **Responsabilidade:** UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- o **Autor(es):** ISSC - International Social Science Council, IDS - Institute of Development Studies and UNESCO
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Why does inequality matter?

The lack of equality inside and amongst countries is hostile towards social, economic, and environmental sustainability. In face of this, the international community has its heart set on facing the challenge of reducing inequalities while promoting inclusion and social justice. It is in such conjuncture that we find the *World Social Science Report 2016 – Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World* (WSSR'16). This report emerges from the need of a holistic view to the study of inequality's many dimensions, by covering seven facets of inequality: economic, social, cultural, political, environmental, spatial, and knowledge.

Inequality: A challenge for social science!

Before addressing multifaceted inequality, it is necessary to go back in time and take a good look at History. Neoliberalism became the main paradigm in Western countries between the 80's and the 90's, a paradigm that is associated to an increase in economic inequalities. The liberalization of economies in a globalized world did

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lead to economic growth, but also to income inequality. The *Sustainable Development Goals* were adopted in 2015, resulting from an effort to face 17 challenges to change the world up to 2030 (Neves & Coelho, 2018), according to a “no one will be left behind” motto (cf. 1; 23). Challenge 10 concerns the goal of reducing inequality (within and among countries) while preserving social, economic, and environmental sustainability. To reduce inequalities is to restore fairness, hence, to repair social justice. And such is done by looking further than economic inequality, by diving into inequality's different dimensions and how they interact. Besides, each region and country has its own idiosyncratic dynamics and processes, which help to create, maintain and reproduce inequalities. In face of such a challenge, it is up to social science to help address the issue of inequality, seeing that “the future of inequality is unwritten” (cf. 2, p. 30). In other words, there are different possible futures and “we have a choice of pathways to those futures” (cf. 22, p. 116).

So... what are the hot topics right now?

Seeing that inequality's many facets are visible around the globe, it is vital to design policies that will set the tone for a transformative pathway. Here, according to the WSSR'16, we are talking about assuring employment and a decent income, also reducing massive wage disparity. Access to quality education is crucial. New economic arrangements, which are able to harmonize work and equity, are needed; at a global level, renewed policies are indispensable to help regulate production, trade, distribution and consumption (cf. 43). Growth should be sustainable and inclusive. At the same time, the promises and perils of technology in an ever more automated world should be accounted for (cf. 41; 42). Inclusive social protection, as well as inclusive governance, are a must-have. Yet, to trigger such foundational processes, a touch of political pressure is indispensable, with political leaders taking the lead; on the contrary, such processes may be sparked by citizens and social movements; even better, alliances between both are forged, thus creating the right context for transformative change to happen. “Small changes can add up to big transformations over space and time” (cf. 43, p. 189).

WSSR'16: To whom and what for?

The WSSR'16 is specially intended for students, experts, decision and policy-makers, practitioners, researchers, financing agencies, and civil society, among many, many others who are a part of the inequality problem. Consequently, its relevance relates to all of us who see ourselves as a part of the solution.

Nuts & bolts of the WSSR'16

Besides an introductory section dedicated to key-messages, the WSSR'16 is roughly divided in seven chapters, organized in a total of four parts.

Part I introduces us to “current trends in inequalities”. In chapter 1, “inequalities: many intersecting dimensions”, inequality is analyzed using a local and global lens, despite the challenges of attempting to compare one same phenomenon, such as income inequality (cf. 6) inside one same country, let alone across very unique countries (cf. 4). Besides unfair, horizontal inequalities (i.e., inequality inside one same group) are propitious to social injustice and violent conflict (cf. 7). Nonetheless, inequality exists in many forms – political

(cf. 12), spatial (cf. 13), even digital! (cf. 11) –, which are in turn interconnected with diverse forms of disadvantage, discrimination, and unfairness. Colonialism is but one example of a hegemonic model that served to aggravate existent inequalities besides creating new ones (cf. 9). Gender is another (cf. 14). In chapter 2, “inequalities in different parts of the world”, inequality/ies is/are examined using a magnifying glass. The specific examples of China (cf. 15), India (cf. 16), Russia (cf. 17), sub-Saharan Africa (cf. 18), the Arab region (cf. 19), the USA (cf. 20), and Brazil (cf. 21) are provided.

Part II encourages us to analyze “the consequences of inequalities”. In chapter 3, “consequences and interactions of multiple inequalities”, the seven facets of inequality are considered in terms of present-future consequences, in an interrelated way. There are worldwide web trends in technology and in trade that originate *economic inequality* and *knowledge inequality* (among other kinds), not only inside but also within countries (cf. 24). *Social inequality* can be observed in the (lack of) access to plain health care, very often contingent to an individual's gender, level of education, socioeconomic status, employment status, and even geographical location (cf. 30). *Cultural inequality* becomes perceptible when certain individuals are deprived from their life aspirations given their ethnic origins (cf. 34), socioeconomic status (cf. 35), or disability (cf. 36). As for *political inequality*, while vertical inequality (i.e., between individuals) does not seem to lead to the risk of political conflict, horizontal inequality does seem to do the trick, and for that reason, policies are needed (cf. 25). Even though ignorance may very often trump scientific evidence, *environmental inequality* is a glaring contemporary (and continuous!) issue, with production and consumption behaviors creating an unsustainable permanence here on Earth (cf. 27); the unequal food distribution system (cf. 33), the complexity of simply acceding to an essential resource as water in sub-Saharan Africa (cf. 28), or the barriers to afford clean, renewable energy cook stoves in India (cf. 29), are mere examples. The own geographical scenery in which an individual lives and works will offer her/him a very particular familiarity with (*spatial*) *inequality*, reliant on variables such as the neighborhood one lives in (cf. 32). Chapter 4 previews gruesome “inequality futures” if measures are not promptly taken to assure environmental sustainability, economic democracy (cf. 37), income fairness (cf. 38), and wealth equality (cf. 39), just to name a few. Political intervention is needed, combining both internal and international actions to fight inequality in its many forms (cf. 40).

Part III shows us “transformative responses, transformative pathways” as an answer to the challenges posed by inequality. First, it is necessary to initiate processes related to “changing the rules”. In chapter 5, the relevance of creating policies that assure social protection (cf. 55), regulation of the labor market, full employment, and labor market outcomes is stressed, given the magnitude of household income to individuals, families, and country (cf. 44). In this respect, measures such as the *Unconditional Basic Income* provided to each citizen to enable her/him to avoid getting stuck below the poverty line (cf. 56), or *Universal Health Coverage* (cf. 57), are equated. The liberalized and globalized kind of financial system that we follow has contributed to instigate a considerable part of inequality; thus, this sector must undergo restructuring and regulation, guaranteeing at all times the sustainability and equality of development movements (cf. 49). Reforms to governance are crucial in reducing inequalities within and among countries, by promoting a fairer redistribution of wealth and land, transformative regulation policies that are socially responsible (cf. 58), besides faster access to social rights (cf. 45, 52, 54). Here, corruption must be prevented and criminalized given its harmful effect on equality, for it rejects social policies such as education or universal health care, and undermines social trust in

the public sector (cf. 59). Politics and domestic-international policy are another cornerstone dimension (cf. 48), with progressive policies (cf. 46, 49) and changes in the tax system (cf. 47, 50) having the potential to be decisive. Here, using legal rights in a counter-hegemonic way can be powerful in fighting against inequality (cf. 53). As for gender, it is a permanent issue; the inclusion of women in politics and policy-making, with access to government and other positions of participation, is way overdue (cf. 51). In chapter 6, there is a call for “mobilizing for change”, which entails concrete actions such as social movements (cf. 60), given the power of protests (cf. 61), uprisings (cf. 62), the arts (cf. 63), etc. Citizens (should) play a decisive role in the public sphere, so they are responsible and accountable for expressing their voice and claiming their rights (cf. 64).

Part IV has one chapter, which inspires us with “transformative knowledge for a just world”. The WSSR’16 Editorial Team starts by identifying guidelines for social science research on the topic of inequality for the next 10 years. A list of 10 priorities for this (re)new(ed) agenda is provided (cf. 68). Despite the value of social science research, caution is needed, since “knowledge divides” (cf. 69, p. 280); in other words, scientists from diverse areas and diverse latitudes are writing on inequality and social justice, which may also impact the research that is produced. There are good examples of good practices, though (cf. 72, 73). Nonetheless, to overcome such issues, but also to inform citizens, policy and opinion-makers’ big data should be used (cf. 70). As a matter of fact, it is ever more indispensable for us all to be using, or at least understanding, the economic and political slang, since it will enable us to understand what is actually happening nearby and around the world (cf. 71).

Putting together the nuts & bolts!

In a nutshell, Part I is an expedition back in time, offering us an insight of how economic inequality around the world prospered and how it led to its current expressions. Yet this view goes further than the economic side of inequality, seeing that there are many interrelated facets of inequality, which combined create and aggravate social, economic, political, and environmental processes that are antagonistic to social justice. From here emerges the challenge of considering and assessing inequality in its diverse and interrelated facets (cf. 3). In Part II, we move forward in time, foreseeing the harmful consequences of the multiple and interrelated forms of inequalities around the world. Part III offers an alternative image of the future, which is accomplishable, first, by knowing one’s History (cf. 66), and only then by looking into the future, via transformative actions to fight against inequalities, given the injustice they contain (cf. 65). Only by changing the rules of the (very real) game and by mobilizing all for change will it be possible to work the odds in our favor. “Rising extreme inequality is a concern for us all” (cf. 67, p. 269). Finally, Part IV leaves us with top priorities and concrete guidelines on how to understand, measure, and suppress inequality. Not only (social) scientists are being accounted for, but citizens in all shapes and sizes too.

Core message of the WSSR’16

Despite misleading advertising, “globalization has generated winners and losers” (cf. 5, p. 48), both inside one same country (e.g., upper class versus middle class) and across countries (e.g., Western countries versus African countries), leaving a few too many (people and countries) behind, regardless of the *Sustainable Development Goals*’ key-dictum. Since social science is defended as essential to understand inequalities and to help transform unfairness into social justice, the WSSR’16 puts forward seven actions that are priority

guidelines for a transformative kind of social science, and which try to address all seven facets of inequality: to build knowledge on inequality; to develop methods to measure inequality in a longitudinal and transversal way; to identify different expressions of inequality; to analyze how different expressions of inequality are created and perpetuated; to consider inequality both farther and globally; to discover, through scientific research, possible forms of equality; to create interdisciplinary know-how on inequality and equality. There is need for (more) transformative forms of public action, rooted in group-based dynamics and interconnected world views, such as inclusive citizenship and social solidarity (cf. 8). In this context, it is not surprising that education plays a protagonist role, being crucial to foster equality processes such as gender parity, peace relationships, public health, or sustainable production-consumption dynamics (cf. 10). How do we measure if the efforts made to reduce inequality are be(com)ing effective in any country? Three (economic, social, and political, respectively) indicators may be used: the Palma ratio, which considers the income share of the top 10% and the income share of the bottom 40%; a subjective assessment of relative well-being in a set of basic indicators, such as education, housing, health, and employment; an objective measurement of representation and decision-making entities (cf. 74).

Take-home message!

The wave of Syrian refugees who are fleeing their country and entering other countries (cf. 26), or the Ebola outbreak in Guinea that reaches nearby – and further – countries (cf. 31), illustrate well how we may live locally but we do reach globally. Despite its unique identity, culture, and history, each individual and country is affected by other individuals and countries. In other words, the whim of separateness is pure fiction. And yet, there are devastating discrepancies between us citizens of the same world; according to Oxfam, “the richest 80 people have the same wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion” (2015, pp. 4-5). Why? Because (income) inequality has increased virtually all over the world, although at different rhythms in each region and country (Chancel, 2018). All different – yet the same – forms of inequality help to increase and perpetuate all the great crises of our time: injustice, poverty, hunger, vulnerability, prejudice, and so on, and so on... The WSSR'16 does not intend to be an in-depth account, since it offers but a brief narrative of inequality around the globe, yet it is wide-ranging, being comprehensive and illustrative enough of the different inequalities. Like a postcard, it gives an image and a short description of reality. It is up to the receiver to decide taking the trip to that place. Besides practical and photographic, the WSSR'16 is successful in shedding light on the path we have followed so far. What comes ahead is a simple forecast, yet it is up to each one of us to change the colors of that future. In such an endeavor, Education may be pinpointed as a pillar leading to equality by educating individuals to regard Earth as a shared home, and other human beings as equals. Yet, to do so, it is necessary to transform Education itself, leading it towards change (Sterling, 2001). For instance, Development Education and Global Citizenship Education are already acknowledged as essential in helping individuals to build notions of sustainable development, gender equity, cultural diversity, peace culture, among others, along schooling (Neves & Coelho, 2018). There is a long way ahead. In Europe, education inequalities are evident. In Portugal, for instance, education level is still very much dependent of the socioeconomic origin (European Commission, 2017). And yet, the WSSR'16 offers examples of good practice, as well as guidelines for effective measures to overthrow inequality. It is us up to us all.

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